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ABSTRACT

In a recent BEST (Bureau of Evaluative Studies and Testing, Indiana University, Bloomington) survey, 10 percent of Indiana University women who responded had experienced some form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in education is any attention of a sexual nature from an instructor or professor which makes a student uncomfortable in class or in the teacher-student relationship, interferes with the student's ability to do classwork, or has an impact on grades received or opportunities for academic advancement. As an assertion of power, sexual harassment reinforces the notion that a woman who values her psychological and physical integrity must limit the range of her educational choices by staying out of non-traditional, male-dominated fields, and having her behavior conform to the stereotypical expectations of male authority figures. The impact of sexual harassment and sex discrimination is discussed, and methods of resolution, including counseling, are explored. In a related article, Nancy Brooks presents a summary of information on students and sexual assault. One in every three women will be assaulted during her lifetime. There are currently no statistics to document the number of sexual assaults on the seven Indiana University campuses, primarily because most go unreported to police departments. Suggestions for helping victims of sexual aggression are presented, as are the symptoms of Rape Trauma Syndrome, which occurs frequently in victims. Survival is not easy, but professional assistance can make the difference. Agencies that provide help are identified. (GEA)

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NOTES on Teaching and Learning

Teaching Resources Center, College of Arts and Sciences, Bloomington — December 1986

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EDUCATION

by D'Ann Campbell, Indiana University, Bloomington*

Definition and Some Causes of Sexual Harassment

In a recent BEST survey, 10% of I.U. women responding had experienced some form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in education is any attention of a sexual nature from an instructor or professor which makes a student uncomfortable in class or in the teacher-student relationship, interferes with the student's ability to do class work, or has an impact on grades received or opportunities for academic advancement. Behaviors constituting sexual harassment may include 1) verbal harassment, abuse of individuals or women[1] as a group, 2) subtle pressure for sexual activity, 3) sexist remarks or jokes emphasizing a woman's clothing, body or sexuality, 4) sexual touching, leering or ogling, 5) explicit demands for sexual favors, accompanied by threat of punishment or promise of reward. Behaviors considered harassing are not isolated. They are typically repeated, unreciprocated and offensive.

* with assistance from Constance Dyer and updated information from Phyllis Klotman, Dean of the Office for Women's Affairs.

[1] Men as well as women can be victims of harassment. However, since our culture tends to view the sexual relation as a power relationship between a dominant and subordinate party, women are the primary victims. Of the few men reporting harassment, young homosexuals are most often victims, followed by an even smaller percentage of heterosexual males, usually younger or from a lower socio-economic background than their male or female harasser.

Sexual attention in the context of an unequal power relationship, like that of teacher and student, is inherently coercive, regardless of the motives of the individual making the advances. Even if no explicit offer or threat is made the student may tolerate or ignore unwanted sexual attention out of fear that a negative response will affect the way in which her work is evaluated by the teacher.

As an assertion of power, sexual harassment reinforces the notion that a woman who values her psychological and physical integrity must limit the range of her educational choices by staying out of non-traditional, male dominated fields, and having her behavior conform to the stereotypical expectations of male authority figures. Recent studies in academic settings indicate that women who are most likely to be victims are those who have either chosen a non-traditional field or do not conform to the stereotypical feminine model—women who are assertive and independent, who actively engage in intellectual discussions with their male instructors, responding to them as mentors rather than as men. There are two possible reasons for this. Some male instructors have difficulty relating to female students as students rather than as women—wives, lovers or daughters. Others, who feel intimidated by women who do not conform to their expectations, may try to make them conform or drive them away by treating them as sexual objects. Another reason for harassment identified in the research is the male instructor's misinterpretation of female students' enthusiasm and interest in him *as a teacher*. Such enthusiasm when displayed by a male student is expected and rewarded; when displayed by a woman it may be interpreted by the instructor as sexual interest.

Impact of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment tells a woman that her role as a sexual being is more important to the teacher than her role as a student. Regardless of the teachers' underlying motivation, sexual attention can cause a female student to experience conflict and stress which may interfere with her performance. Valuable time and energy are wasted in handling an ongoing pattern of harassment. The student often absents herself from classroom activities or foregoes use of the school facilities or equipment in order to avoid confronting the harasser. The experience can undermine her self-confidence and ambition and prevent her from pursuing her educational goals to the fullest extent. Over time, a woman's reluctance to draw attention to herself in or outside of class, and her failure to pursue goals vigorously, reinforces the belief held by some that female students are less motivated, and less capable of succeeding. This in

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turn affects evaluation of women's work in general.[2] Finally, in institutions where harassment is tolerated a woman who does succeed is likely to be suspected of sexual manipulation, a response which avoids acknowledging her intellectual abilities.

Common Experiences

In fields that have traditionally been male-dominated, harassment is often aimed at women in general and is not intended to lead to sexual activity. Some instructors who are used to dealing solely with male students resent the presence of women in their classes. This resentment may result from an instructor's belief that women cannot be successful in his particular field. On a practical level it is often caused by real or imagined pressure to change a lecturing style or to adjust laboratory or field study conditions to a sexually mixed group of students. Frequently, the instructor engages in a pattern of abusive or sexist comments in class, verbally harasses or humiliates individual female students, or gives consistently lower grades to women students. In one case a few years ago, an instructor announced to the class that he liked to make jokes at the expense of women or the women's movement and suggested that students who objected drop the class or change sections.

Dealing with sexual harassment is especially difficult for graduate women who, because they have specialized, do not have the escape mechanisms available to the undergraduate. They cannot drop a class, take another section or forego a particular course taught by a sexist instructor. They cannot change their major or "drop out" for a while. Sometimes the harasser is a "gatekeeper", an individual who teaches a required course, a graduate advisor, thesis advisor or a department chairman. Women faced with sexual pressure or antipathy from such individuals often feel paralyzed and are afraid to tell anyone, because they cannot afford to jeopardize their careers by making a formal complaint which may not be believed or taken seriously.

[2] Studies in academic and employment settings reveal that both male and female evaluators consistently give higher ratings to work or resumes identified with a male name than to identical items identified with a female name.

Sexual Harassment as a Form of Sex Discrimination

Sex discrimination in education and employment is prohibited by federal law and university policy. Women who experience discrimination at the university on the job, in the classroom, or elsewhere on campus may seek assistance from the Office for Women's Affairs or the Affirmative Action Office.

Both the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) have formally recognized sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination, and the EEOC has issued federal guidelines applicable to the university on sexual harassment. These guidelines have been incorporated in a system-wide university policy statement which was published in the Spring of 1982.

A person who finds a work or academic situation difficult and wonders if sexual harassment or discrimination may be occurring may wish to contact the Office for Women's Affairs or Affirmative Action. The staffs of these offices are available to provide answers to questions and expertise in resolution of these situations. Inquiring at one of these offices does not require that a formal complaint be filed. Every effort is made to evaluate the situation and to arrive at solutions in ways that are in accordance with the victim's wishes. If informal efforts by these offices to stop or remedy harassment are not successful, formal university complaint procedures are available.

Sexual Harassment as a Breach of Professional Responsibility

The teacher-student relationship is a professional one, involving certain responsibilities on the part of the faculty member or instructor. Under the Code of Academic Ethics adopted by the University Faculty Council, "Students are (to be) respected as individuals; the teacher seeks to establish a relationship of mutual trust, and adheres to the proper role as intellectual guide and counselor." The faculty member must also "strive to develop among students respect for others and their opinions by demonstrating his or her own respect for each student as an individual, regardless of . . . sex . . ." The faculty member who makes sexual advances or relates to a student primarily as a sexual object violates this code of ethics and effectively destroys his mentoring relationship not only with that student, but with other students as well. His objectivity is drawn into question, whether his behavior is perceived by others as favoritism or abuse. Male students may resent what they see as an unfair advantage given to women, which fosters hostility and reinforces negative stereotypes of women. Female students may avoid the faculty member's courses altogether or may be reluctant to seek him out for individual attention. Finally, both male and female students may lose respect for the teacher and for the academic profession in general. The educational atmosphere is subtly poisoned when the teacher-student relationship is polarized by sex in this manner.

Since sexual harassment has been defined as a form of sex discrimination and recognized as a breach of professional ethics, some individuals have expressed concern that faculty and administrators are rendered particularly vulnerable to false charges which would be difficult to disprove. Because allegations of sex-related offenses have been viewed traditionally with suspicion, most students are justifiably reluctant to complain. In fact, sexual harassment like rape and sexual assault is significantly underreported. However, the majority of persons reporting to OWA have only wanted advice about how to handle the problem themselves. People requesting assistance wanted only quiet and confidential resolution, assurance that

the behavior would stop and that they would be protected against future retaliation for having raised the issue. All complaints so far have been resolved confidentially and informally. Any individual with questions about the processing of harassment complaints is encouraged to contact Nancy Brooks, Director, or Phyllis Klotman, Dean for Women's Affairs, Memorial Hall East 123, 335-3849.

Counseling Students about Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment, like rape, is an experience few victims talk about easily. One of the most injurious myths that has grown up around the issue is the idea that a woman will not receive unwanted, unwelcome sexual attention unless she does something to encourage it. Both the woman who experiences sexual harassment and the friends she tells are often quick to look for "causes"—perhaps her attire, her behavior, or something she said "caused" the man to make sexual advances. If women are taught to expect unwanted sexual attention as the natural and uncontrollable product of male sexuality, and are encouraged to blame themselves when it occurs, it is not hard to understand why the problem of sexual harassment was a hidden one until the mid-70s when it was first recognized and treated as a serious legal and social issue.

A young student entering school who experiences sexual harassment is likely to see it as a purely personal and embarrassing problem. She needs to be informed as part of her introduction to college life that it can happen and that she has a legal right to be free of it. Then, if she has a problem she will be more likely to seek appropriate counselling and advice. Remember that regardless of how you might have acted in a similar situation, the student who comes to you needs a supportive counselor. Do not encourage her to engage in guilty soul searching—what she could or should have done. Do not question her interpretation of the events or attempt to minimize its seriousness. If she felt intimidated or embarassed by the behavior, then there is a genuine problem that needs to be addressed. Help the student to see that her experience is not unique or blameworthy, and encourage her to talk with people at the Office for Women's Affairs. They will treat her report confidentially, counsel her about ways of dealing with the situation personally, or intervene on her behalf if she wishes. Even if the student believes she can handle the situation herself, it is important that she advise OWA. Many harassers are repeaters; if OWA has previous reports on an individual, it may be possible to help the student devise an effective strategy. Furthermore, by reporting the incident to OWA, the student can protect herself against future incidents or retaliation if her own efforts to resolve the problem are unsuccessful.

Why Is She Behaving This Way?

A summary of information on students and sexual assault

by Nancy Brooks, Director, Office for Women's Affairs, IUB

Sexual aggression is an emotional issue for most individuals. It is difficult to talk about or to think about rape and sexual assault. At the same time, these subjects are claiming more and more of our attention in the media. For an increasing number of faculty, rape and sexual assault are subjects "close to home" because their students are being assaulted. Several nationally known experts are calling it an epidemic as the latest statistics indicate—

> 1 in every 3 women will be assaulted during her lifetime.
>
> or
>
> a girl of 12 alive today stands a 30% chance of being assaulted during her lifetime.
>
> or
>
> preliminary findings from a national survey indicate that 1 in every 3 *college age* women has experienced sexual coercion, assault, or rape.

There are currently no statistics to document the number of sexual assaults on the I.U. campuses, primarily because most cases go unreported to police departments. The reasons for the low reporting rate are several. The primary reason students do not report is that many do not recognize an incident for what it is. The definitions that follow are those developed by professionals who work with survivors of sexual aggression. (Legal definitions are used by police and courts are not necessarily the same and are usually more complicated.)

Sexual aggression is any sexual activity accomplished without mutual consent. The activity may be accomplished by ignoring the unwilling person's protests, by use of physical force, by threat of force, or by psychological coercion. If the sexual activity is intercourse, that is rape. If sexual intercourse is attempted, that is attempted rape.

When individuals who have been subjected to sexual aggression of any kind are able to name the experience for what it is, their recovery begins. It is also usually true that whether the individual names the experience or not, the symptoms of trauma syndrome occur and persist.

Consequently, it is important for a community to recognize sexual aggression and to aid survivors in their recovery.

Some survivors of sexual aggression report to the police. Sometimes, however, a student will report an incident to a trusted friend, a professor, or to the agencies that offer assistance to victims. When a student confides in a trusted teacher, what can be done? The I.U. Office for Women's Affairs in Bloomington offers these suggestions:

1. Most victims of sexual aggression are women; but it is important to remember that men can be assaulted.
2. The reaction of the listener will depend upon that person's level of awareness about the many myths concerning rape in our society. Basic sexist or homophobic stereotypes can crop up at such times, too.

   It is not unusual, for example, to want to protect the young woman victim or to want to punish the accused assailant. Or it may be easy to assume that a man who was assaulted is homosexual. Since sexual aggression and rape are highly emotional issues it helps to monitor one's reactions and to try to avoid any assumptions about the victim/survivor.
3. Facts to remember: Very few people report falsely (less than 1%, in fact). No one deserves to be raped. Rape, sexual assault, and sexual aggression are crimes of violence. No one asks to be violated. The assailant/rapist's goal is to control the body of another person. This is not sex. It is easy to ask why a victim was in a particular situation, wearing certain clothing, drinking, etc. These kinds of questions blame the victim rather than the aggressor.

   Survivors of sexual aggression have been subjected to violence and will have emotional trauma and sometimes behave in ways that are difficult to understand. There are professionals in most communities who are trained to help. Recovery is possible. The victim's life is changed, but not ruined permanently, so long as he or she is able to name the experience and to talk with those who can help.
4. Most survivors of sexual aggression suffer from Rape Trauma Syndrome. This is true whether the person has been raped according to legal definitions or subjected to unwanted sexual activity of any sort or has survived an attempted rape or assault. It is important to remember that this person has been robbed of the right to control his or her own body. One police officer calls rape "the crime second only to murder."

   Rape Trauma Syndrome symptoms include: Mood swings; sleeping disorders (nightmares, inability to sleep, sleeping too much); eating disorders (anorexia nervosa, bulimia, compulsive overeating); chronic depression; fearfulness and anxiety; inability to concentrate; chronic fatigue, and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Frequently survivors of sexual assault do not identify these symptoms as a result of the assault, which makes recovery even more difficult. Professional intervention of various kinds is important and helpful.

A student who has been assaulted may be unable to complete course work on time, may ask for deadline extensions, and may have difficulty in maintaining regular attendance in class. The student may become less able to participate in class discussion or may be more vocal in expressing anger. The student may show lack of confidence about academic work. Many will want to drop out of school. Some victims talk about suicide. Sometimes the teaching professional will be aware of the reasons for these kinds of changes, but not always. Encouraging conversation with a student whose academic work is suffering may bring out the fact that sexual aggression has occurred. When that happens, referring the student to appropriate agencies and offices will help the student and the teacher. Such referrals are appropriate whether or not the student chooses to report to the police. A police report is not required in order for a victim to find help.

How to Find Help:

Most communities have women's crisis hotlines, rape hotlines, or shelters for battered women and children. These are good places to call for women and men who have been subjected to sexual assault of any kind.

Local and campus police departments usually have referral information. Community Mental Health Centers can provide assistance.

The Office for Women's Affairs in Bloomington has referral information for communities all over the country. The contact person is Nancy Brooks at 335-1151.

Agencies that provide care for the survivor also provide support for those who are concerned about her/him. It is important to talk with a professional who understands trauma syndrome and recovery when questions come up about a survivor.

Survivors are very helpful to one another—the support group is often the treatment of choice in recovery from sexual assault and the resulting trauma syndrome.

In Summary

Students who confide that sexual aggression has occurred may feel guilty about the incident and may blame themselves. A careful listener is very important and it is essential to be watchful for assumptions and old rape-myth beliefs. Recovery is possible and the victim's life is not ruined permanently. Survival is not easy, but professional assistance can make the difference. A caring teaching professional can facilitate the recovery process by listening carefully, locating assistance for the victim, and by providing a continuing supportive relationship with the student.